

This month saw the circulation of a remarkable piece of Trumpian False News by the North Herefordshire Conservatives. This four page spread of 'alternative facts' is titled Herefordshire Champion and has been delivered via our doughty Posties to every household in the county.

Readers will note the publication offers no policies or ideas for what the Tories will do differently. All it does is seek to blame the Independent-led coalition for everything under the sun.

This 'organ' is full of the most outrageous nonsense, so much so that it is impossible to let it pass entirely without comment on grounds of accuracy and transparency alone ... so here goes ...

Headline – Cost of the Coalition Revealed...

The leading article suggests that the first 4 years of non-Tory rule in Herefordshire has been an unmitigated disaster. For the Tories perhaps, but hardly for anyone else. In contradiction of the article's assertion, **the Independent-led coalition has been delivering infrastructure projects to time and to cost which is a first for Herefordshire.**

We arrived in 2019 to find that the City Link Road – just 800m of tarmac between Alyestone Hill and Edgar Street was more than £6m overspent, due to **botched Tory compulsory purchase of land** along the route, and mired in legal disputes with landowners. Making it the most expensive piece of tarmac in Europe!

Worse was to come when it became clear that the **City Link Road £6m Tory overspend** meant the funding for the other promised improvement schemes in the city had been frittered away (TORY PLANS for safe walking and cycling routes into the city; Commercial Road, Blueschool Street and Market Street improvements; and the Transport Hub at the train station), meaning we had to go out in search of new funds and to use precious reserve funds to deliver on these broken Tory promises.

Slow to deliver **Tory schemes to completely dig up High Town** and lay expensive granite imported from China and South America were scaled-back by the Independents so that the retail core of the city wasn't utterly disrupted when covid restrictions were relaxed.

The trees chopped down over the last 20 years by the Tories throughout the city centre will take longer to replace, but in the meantime relocatable planters with integral seating have been provided to **create new space to relax in** and to introduce some colour and shade to these public spaces.

The Independents have committed to **remove the disastrous trip hazard that is the raised curbing in Widemarsh Street** after many years during which and hundreds of injuries have been caused to locals and to visitors from this botched shared-space scheme.

The Independents have supported the **Stronger Towns Project which is bringing £23m of inward investment** to the city to improve the river area, invest in an improved museum, to build a new library, to provide new sports and community facilities on the south side of the city and new university facilities.



The Independents have **secured more than £25m of funding** to enable a new Transport Hub to be built at the station and the safe walking and cycling routes to finally get built along and across the City Link Road. This funding will also improve cycle routes on Aylestone Hill and improve traffic flow through the narrow streets within the old city walls.

As an administration we have invested all the road repair and maintenance funding provided to us by government in the county's road network. **Unlike the Tories, who plundered road repair monies** to pay for their overspends on trying to make a business case to build the Southern Link Road and Western Relief Roads - **neither of which could meet Department of Transport's Value for Money requirements**, and had to be halted as monumental wastes of public money.

Further money was discovered as having been wasted by the desperate Tories on these undeliverable road schemes, when Independents uncovered that – contrary to very public statements made by the then **Tory Council Leader – he had borrowed even more money in a dodgy loan agreement with the Conservative-controlled Marches LEP**, which subsequently we were forced to repay from council reserves. We are legally prevented by the LEP from saying how much money was involved in this off the books, so-called 'gentleman's agreement'.

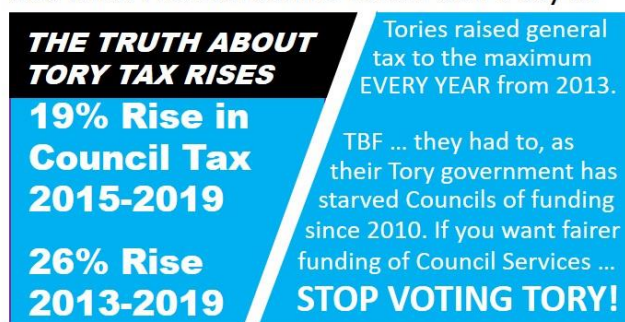
Herefordshire Tories say ...



The article accuses the Independent-led coalition of raising council tax to the maximum at a time of unprecedented economic crisis. Conveniently stepping over the fact that this crisis has been caused almost entirely by a chaotic Conservative government crashing the UK economy and delivering a disastrous Brexit exit from Europe which has left business and farming reeling.

Inflation currently sits at more than 10%, but despite this, the rise in **council tax rises under the Indy-led council is lower than the council tax rises under the previous Tory administration** when inflation was less than 2%!

but what Herefordshire Tories don't say ...



It is national and local Conservative Party policies which have brought this country to the point of being a laughing-stock internationally and has crippled local government finances.

Herefordshire Council has at least £100m less each year now than it had in 2010 when the Tories came into power. Think what could be done with that money locally!

That money is still being taken from you all in tax, but it is being kept at Westminster rather than redistributed to fund local services and investment projects at the local

government level. Both of our Conservative MPs have voted consistently to reduce funding to local government and **it is the Tory government's policy to maximise the raising of local taxation through Council Tax** – irrespective of whether you live in a wealthy urban or poor rural part of the country.

Rather than being a 'coalition of chaos' as the Tories put it, we have dealt with 3 major flooding events and over 40 months of Covid pandemic, whilst digging up the drains on all the Tory blunders and putting them right where we can, delivering the investment schemes we inherited which weren't half-baked, winning further inward investment for the county and keeping essential services going as well as investing in Market Towns – something the Tories never did, building more affordable homes than the Tories ever did, investing in culture and the arts, in leisure and tourism, in broadband and super-fast fibre, and in a whole range of environmental and climate change initiatives to:

ensure that Herefordshire becomes an exemplar of 21st century rural living!